

PERSONAL VERSUS MASS COMMUNICATION

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Abstract: From the comparison of the various aspects of advertising and personal selling, it can be seen that personal selling is a more effective and powerful communication tool than advertising, but advertising is more time and cost efficient than personal selling. Thus advertising and personal selling are tools at the disposal of a marketer and subjects to a firm's overall objectives.

Keywords: advertising, personal selling, communication, tool.

Why it is so much money spent on advertising? Is advertising necessary? The answer is that no purchase can take place without some form of communication between the seller and the potential buyer. The exchange of money for some product or service takes place when all the participants in such a trading activity have been informed of and have accepted the terms and conditions of the exchange. In a free market society, consumers buy goods and services because they hope to obtain satisfaction through their usage and consumption. In the same way, people give financial support to charitable organizations because they obtain some reward, if only psychologically, by doing so.

Advertising as a Socio-Economic Communication

In order to build a communication link between mass production and mass markets, a mass communication tool was needed, and the device was advertising. Most definitions of advertising stress three basic elements – that advertising is *communication* aimed at a *mass audience* and that it has a *socio-economic function*. For instance, the definition given by the American Marketing association is as follows: Advertising is any paid form of non-personal presentation and promotion of ideas, goods or services by an identified sponsor.

The first element in the definition is that advertising is a set of communications originating from a sponsor. The flow of information is unidirectional and is directed at the advertiser's customers and prospects. The second element is that advertising is mass communication, because it is directed at an entire market. It is different from such business communications as internal communication within a single firm or from marketing communication that a firm has with clients involving personal contact, such as personal selling through a sales force. Third, advertising has a socio-economic function, resulting from its long-run objective of convincing customers and potential buyers to buy a firm's advertised products or services or to adopt the advertised idea or behavior.

1. The Economics of Advertising Communications. It is important to emphasize that commercial advertising has a precise economic objective. This objective is, in the

long-run, to contribute to the firm's sales and profits. To meet this objective, advertising is assigned short-run objectives that contribute to a firm's wide objectives.

To be justified from an economic point of view, advertising, along with the other elements of the marketing program, must help generate a firm's gross profits (long-run, and discounted at their present value, but excluding the direct costs of advertising). A marketer's task is to ensure that a firm's gross profits are greater than costs of advertising, which include the costs of media, the costs of creating and producing the advertisement, and the research costs, so that the firm retains a flow of net profits.

2. The Social Objectives of Advertising. Increasingly, advertising is being used by non-profit organizations. For instance, an advertising campaign to raise funds for a cancer research institute, the Red Cross, or some other charitable organization, does not result in sales and profits. An advertisement campaign to induce people to adopt better health habits, or to use safety belts in their cars, or advertising messages sponsored by a political party to gain citizens' votes for the next election do not result in dollar-measurable effects. Whenever advertising is used, however, certain social benefits are anticipated by the sponsors. Whether the social gains warrant the advertising expenditures is a far more difficult question to answer because the effects are not quantifiable as for business advertising. Nevertheless, no advertising campaign is likely to be run unless the sponsors feel that the social and/or economic gains warrant the advertising expenditures.

Personal versus Mass Communication

Personal communications through sales representatives and advertising communications have a common objective: both are directed at potential customers to increase a firm's sales and profits. However, the two types of communication differ in their nature and effectiveness because of two essentially different characteristics they possess: the type of medium they use and their cost structure.

1. The Medium of Personal Communications. Advertising communications are transmitted through the mass-media newspaper, magazines, television, and radio. In contrast, sales force communications take place between a salesperson and a customer, a prospect, or at most a small group of potential customers.

Figure no. 1 and Figure no. 2 show the difference between the personal selling communications and advertising communications. A firm communicates with its sales force through training or retraining programs, which are formal communications systems. Sales meetings and directives that a sales manager periodically sends to sales personnel are examples of the more usual and recurrent formal communications. During sales calls a sales representative communicates information to customers and prospects. Unlike advertising, however, these communications occurs more than once and are multidirectional: the information flows back and forth between the sales representatives and customers and prospects. For instance, a sales representative inquires about a customer's need. To do so a representative gives information about the products and services for sale and answers the questions and objections of prospective buyers.

This information goes back and forth between the sales representative and the customer in a continuous and two-directional communication flow. This continues until the customer ends the process by signing an order or by changing attitude.

These attitudinal or behavioral changes constitute the feedback on the effect of personal selling communications. Another important difference between personal communications and advertising is that during a sales call a sales representative can

observe the effect of the sales pitch on potential customers. Consequently, the representative can adjust or reorient the message depending on the feedback received from the client. The sales manager can directly assess the quality and effectiveness of a sales communication by observing the customer's behavioral responses that is, whether a customer places an order or is satisfied with the product or service.

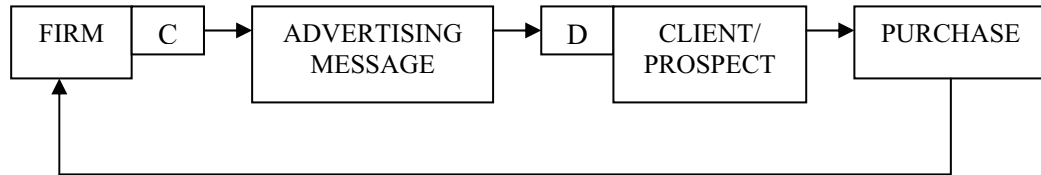


Figure no. 1 Advertising communication

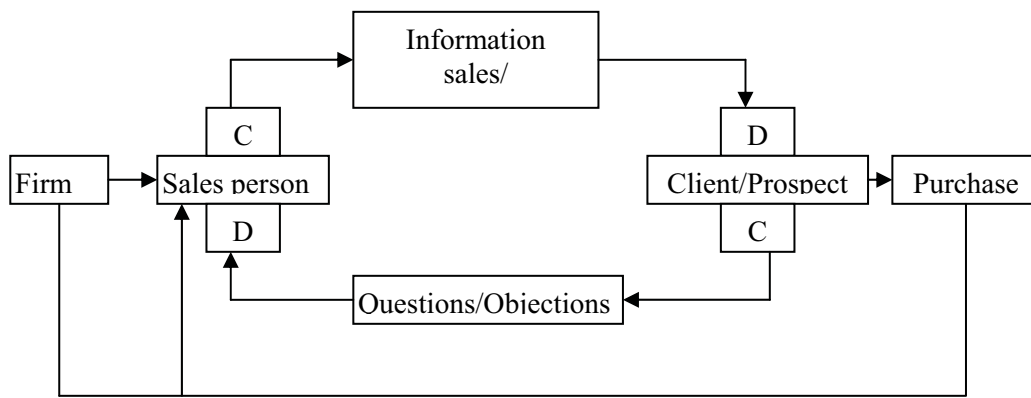


Figure no. 2 Personal Selling Communication

1. Consequences of the Types of Communication Used. The use of personal or mass communications has several implications for the quality and efficiency of marketing communications. A comparison of the advantages and drawbacks of personal communication and advertising is shown in table no. 1.

Differences Affecting the Communicator. The communicator of advertising messages generally has only a global knowledge of a market, that is, an "average profile" of a "typical" consumer in a target segment. Advertising messages are directed toward this average individual, who may resemble to a greater or lesser degree any of the actual individuals in the target market. A sales representative, however, communicates personally with customers and prospects and thus can learn a lot about them. Through intuition and observation (two important assets of a successful sales person) the motives and interests of customers can be detected and the communication adjusted accordingly. In marketing communications, sales representatives are to advertisers what craft people are to mass producers.

Differences Affecting the Message. Once an advertising communication has taken place, a sales manager must wait for the effects, if any, to become evident. In contrast, personal selling messages are adaptive: depending upon the feedback received during a sales presentation, a salesperson can adjust the message or leave it unchanged. Arguments that seem to satisfy potential customer concerns can be emphasized or sales points that seem irrelevant to the customers' decision-making processes can be played down.

Tables no. 1 Comparison of the advantages and drawbacks of advertising and personal selling as communication tools

		personal selling	advertising
source	- Communicator's knowledge of the audience	+	-
message	- Flexibility and adaptability of messages	+	-
	- Number of arguments that can be effectively used	+	-
	- Control by the firm of the content and format of the message	-	+
medium	- Personal contact	+	-
	- Possibility of communicating with many consumers in a short period of time	-	+
audience	- Effects of coding errors	+	-
	- Ability to attract and hold consumer's attention	+	-
	- Time of which communication takes place	+	-
effects	- Time lag between communication and purchase	+	-

In the media, an advertiser can emphasize at most one or two reasons of buying a product. This is not the case for the salespeople, who can stress many persuasive selling points during a single sales call.

An advertiser can, however, have some control over the sales messages content and presentation. Advertisers carefully select the theme, copy, and layout of their advertisements. They make sure that the message can be properly understood by prospective buyers and can influence their target audience.

Sales managers can also test sales arguments and train the sales force to make effective presentations. However, a firm has no direct control over the exact content and wording of the message each salesperson actually delivered by a sales manager can do little to prevent salespeople from delivering poor presentations or being rude to customers.

Differences Affecting the Media. Personal and advertising communications have both advantages and drawbacks with regard to the effectiveness of the media through which a message is delivered. A sales representative has the advantage of establishing personal and often lively communication with a customer or prospect, while advertising, and especially print advertising, can be perceived by consumers as an impersonal way to communicate. However, advertising has an important advantage over personal selling: through the mass media, it can reach a large number of people in a short period of time, whereas a sales representative can make only a limited number of calls in a day.

Differences Affecting the Audience. This latter advantage of advertising over personal selling has a negative counterpart in its effects on the audience of the communication. Any blunder that a sales representative makes during a sales call affects only that customer or prospect. At worst, an inadequate salesperson affects sales negative during the time he or she is part of the sales force and only in a limited territory. But an advertisement in poor taste has more damaging effects because it reaches an entire market simultaneously.

A salesperson also gets some attention from a client once the sales pitch has started. In contrast, the attention given to the mass media and to the advertising messages they convey cannot be controlled. Commercials often reach consumers during their leisure time, when they are watching television or reading newspapers or magazines. In contrast, a salesperson usually calls on customers during working hours; meeting sales representatives is often a part of the duties of the individuals on whom a sales representative calls. Thus, the audience is more favorably disposed toward listening to a sales pitch.

Differences Affecting the Effects. As far as communication effects are concerned, personal selling has a distinct advantage over advertising because it produces immediate responses. After a salesperson has succeeded in proving to a customer that the offer is superior to that of competitors, the selling process can be completed by persuading the customer to sign an order. In contrast, even when a commercial has been convincing enough to trigger the act of purchasing, this behavioral response cannot be immediate. There is always a time lag between the moment a commercial is seen or heard by a consumer and the moment the purchase is completed. This lag is the time necessary for the consumer to drive to a neighborhood store or, more realistically, to wait for the next purchase occasion. Of course, during this time, the consumer may be subjected to other commercials from competitive products or may decide not to buy the product.

A Cost-Benefit Comparison of Both Types of Communications

From the comparison of the various aspects of advertising and personal selling, it can be seen that personal selling is a more effective and powerful communication tool than advertising. This does not mean that only personal selling should be used as a marketing tool and that advertising should have only a marginal role in a firm's marketing program. Contacting an individual through a sales representative costs about a hundred times more than an advertisement. Consequently, unless the personal element of a selling communication is essential to a firm, marketing managers will find that advertising is more time and cost efficient.

Advertising can be defined as a mass communication tool with an economic purpose. There are several implications of the definition, and any study of advertising should include an analysis of communication theory and the role of advertising in a firm's communication system. Advertisers also need to understand the role advertising and personal selling play in the marketing program.

From these analyses can be drawn some important conclusions. First, because advertising is a mass communication, it tends to lose contact with its audience and is efficient only if it is based on research. Second, advertising is not an isolated phenomenon in a firm's activities and must be an integrated part of a firm's communication network. Third, advertising is only one tool at the disposal of a marketer and therefore is subject to a firm's overall objectives. Therefore, it must be integrated with the other marketing elements into a coherent marketing program.

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